

*"Winding your way down the kame brings you to the marl flats. Here the vegetation is similar to the runoff channels at Yellowstone's geyser basins, and like at Yellowstone, fringed gentians are the dominant fall bloomer here."*

*Susan Post, Hiking Illinois*

# Natural Areas of Cook County

*Bluff Springs Fen Nature Preserve*



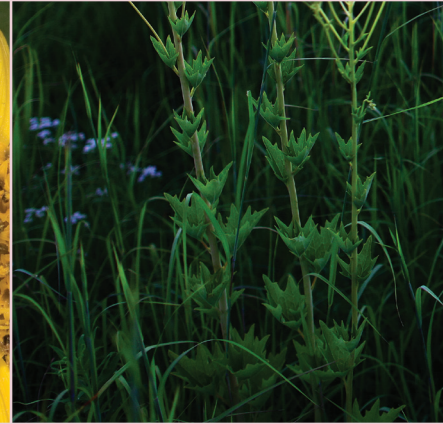




A lush, isolated valley of emerald green, Bluff Springs Fen Nature Preserve is a rare, hidden, gem. Flanked by two massive gravel mines, the constant rumblings of mining operations are a reminder of how close this preserve came to becoming a mine itself. Before protection and restoration, Bluff Springs was a favored place for off-road vehicles, gravel quarries, fly ash, and rubbish dumping. Today, the preserve's quarries are ponds, and volunteers have removed the trash and worked to restore degraded habitats. The preserve's 95 acres now hold a tremendous diversity of plants and animals. Streams draped with Hill's oak and massive burr oaks meander through woodland and savanna on the western half of the preserve. The eastern half is made up of a complex of prairie and wetlands, including one of the finest fens anywhere. Described as "one of the rarest wetland community types in the entire continental United States", fens occur where uninterrupted upwellings of cold, highly mineralized groundwater emerge from the ground and maintains unique soil conditions. Six species of orchids grow in the fen, including the rare and delicate white







lady's slipper, grass pink, and snake-mouth orchids. Where water pools and evaporates, minerals concentrate in the soil, creating a rare habitat called a marl flat. Here you'll find rare plants like grass of Parnassus, slender bog arrow grass, Kalm's lobelia, beaked spike rush, and shrubby cinquefoil. Hills dotting the preserve are known as "kames." These formed at the base of glacial waterfalls, where gravel and sand piled into a neat, conical hill. Kames harbor a unique habitat known as dry, gravel prairie. Rare plants, such as prairie smoke, fringed puccoon, woolly milkweed, and side oats grama grass are typical of dry, alkaline, gravel soils. In total, the preserve supports over 450 plant species, with 13 threatened or endangered ones. Mid-June through July is prime time for spotting more than 50 butterfly species, including the rare and beautiful Baltimore checkerspot. In the clear streams, look for the mottled sculpin, a rare and strange-looking fish that only occurs in the cleanest waterways. Maps and excellent trail guides are available in the cemetery parking area.

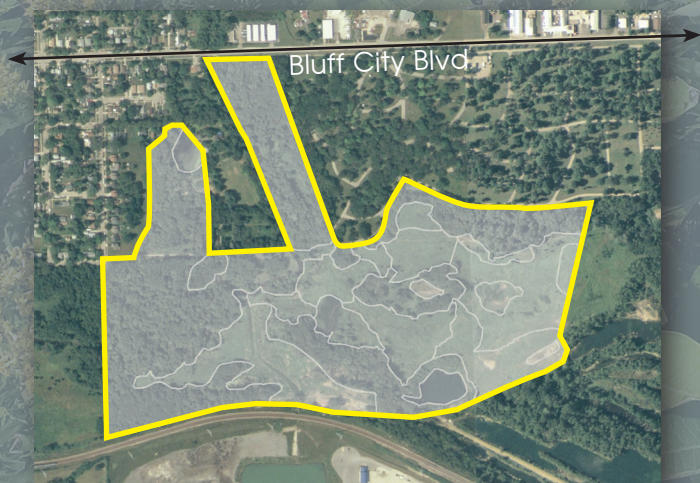




## Directions

Take US 20 to Bluff City Blvd., turn south. Go one mile and enter cemetery at main entrance. Follow cemetery signs to the small parking area at the cemetery's southern edge. After hours, take Bluff City to Gifford Rd. Go left (south) .6 miles to preserve's eastern entrance. Cover and Seneca snakeroot photos courtesy of Doug Taron. Other photos by INHS staff.

GPS: N 42.0140, W -88.2469



ILLINOIS NATURAL  
HISTORY SURVEY  
PRAIRIE RESEARCH INSTITUTE



 **BOEING**

